



News Release

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Los Angeles District
Public Affairs Office
P.O. Box 532711
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Jay Field		(213) 452-3717
Contact	publicaffairs-spl@usace.army.mil	Telephone

LITCHFIELD PARK MAN HELPS REBUILD IRAQ

Los Angeles – A Litchfield Park man was recently awarded the Bronze Star Medal for service in Iraq. Sgt. Maj. Jeffrey Koontz, a 1978 graduate of Agua Fria High School in Avondale, was until March the Operations Sergeant Major for the Central District, Gulf Region Division of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers in Baghdad.

As a member of the “world’s premiere public engineering organization,” Sgt. Maj. Koontz was responsible for integrating the Corps’ civilian workforce into a combat environment. His leadership ensured that 250 soldiers, civilian employees, contractors and Iraqi engineers were protected from insurgent attacks and ready for work each day.

Koontz said his work resembled herding cats. “Civilians have a hard time of realizing how dangerous it is and that every time we moved between safe zones we were at great risk,” he said. His solution: try to eliminate all unnecessary movement. The tactic succeeded. Every one of the district’s employees under his watch made it back home safely.

Koontz and his fellow Corps soldiers and civilians tackled the difficult reconstruction mission in an effort to transform Iraq into a country with a stable government and freedom for its people. Koontz’ team covered a 55,000-square-mile area, including Iraq’s dangerous Al-Anbar

Province, and managed reconstruction projects that ranged from digging a well for a village to refurbishing the giant turbines of a 40-megawatt power plant.

Sgt. Maj. Koontz said the job was overwhelming, yet achievable. “I felt like I was a mouse and the Iraqi mission was like moon cheese,” he said. “I just kept eating.”

By year’s end, Corps members will have started more than 3,000 projects worth \$11.2 billion under the Iraq Reconstruction Program. More than 150,000 Iraqi citizens currently work on these projects to restore their country’s aged and ailing infrastructure that has suffered from 35 years of neglect. New construction is completed every day on projects that boost the Iraqi economy and improve the quality of life for Iraqis.

Sgt. Maj. Koontz returned to his permanent post in April as Security and Law Enforcement chief for the Corps’ Los Angeles District. Out of an office in Phoenix, Koontz handles security for the 700-member team that manages engineering projects in southern California, Arizona and Nevada.

An Army reservist, Koontz began his current active duty stint from the Maricopa County Sheriff’s Office, where he served as a deputy sheriff, shift commander and special projects division commander. There he developed the skills that no doubt help him hold down the fort for the Los Angeles District.

Koontz confronts daily the challenges of keeping Corps facilities and employees safe and secure. An impossible task, he says, even if given an unlimited budget. “We as Americans like our freedoms over what we consider acceptable risk,” he said. “As a government employee and a taxpayer, I have to ensure that what I spend my efforts on is the very best ‘bang for the buck.’”